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THE
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SOME EXPERIENCES OF AN IRISH R.M.

BY E. Æ. SOMERVILLE AND MARTIN ROSS

No. X. THE HOUSE OF FAHY



NOTHING could shake the conviction of Maria, my wife's brown water-spaniel, that she was by nature and by practice a house dog. Every one of Shreelane's many doors had, at one time or another, slammed upon her expulsion, and each one of them had seen her stealthy, irrepressible return to the sphere that she felt herself so eminently qualified to grace. For her the bone, thriftily interred by Tim Connor's terrier, was a mere diversion; even the fruitage of the ash-pit had little charm for an accomplished *habituée* of the kitchen. She knew to a nicety which of the doors could be burst open by assault, at which it was necessary to whine sycophantically; and the clinical thermometer alone could furnish a parallel for her perception of mood in those in authority. In the case of Mrs. Cadogan she knew that there were seasons when instant and complete self-effacement was the only course to pursue; therefore when, on a certain morning in July, on my way through the downstairs regions to my office, I saw her approach the kitchen door with her usual circumspection, and, on hearing

her name enunciated indignantly by my cook, withdraw swiftly to a city of refuge at the back of the hayrick, I drew my own conclusions.

Had she remained, as I did, she would have heard the disclosure of a crime that lay more heavily on her digestion than her conscience.

'I can't put a thing out o' me hand but he's watching me to whip it away!' declaimed Mrs. Cadogan, with all the disregard of her kind for the accident of sex in the brute creation. 'Twas only last night I was back in the scullery when I heard Bridget let a screech, and there was me brave dog up on the table eating the roast beef that was after coming out from the dinner!'

'Brute!' interjected Philippa, with what I well knew to be a simulated wrath.

'And I had planned that bit of beef for the luncheon,' continued Mrs. Cadogan in impassioned lamentation, 'the way we wouldn't have to intrude on the cold turkey! Sure he has it that dhragged, that all we can do with it now is run it through the mincing machine for the Major's sandwiches.'

At this appetising suggestion I thought fit to intervene in the deliberations.

'One thing,' I said to Philippa afterwards, as I wrapped up a bottle of Yanatas in a Cardigan jacket and rammed it into an already apoplectic Gladstone bag, 'that I do draw the line at, is taking that dog with us. The whole business is black enough as it is.'

'Dear,' said my wife, looking at me with almost clairvoyant abstraction, 'I could manage a second evening dress if you didn't mind putting my tea-jacket in your portmanteau.'

Little, thank heaven! as I know about yachting, I knew enough to make pertinent remarks on the incongruity of an ancient 60-ton hireling and a fleet of smart evening dresses; but none the less I left a pair of indispensable boots behind, and the tea-jacket went into my portmanteau.

It is doing no more than the barest justice to the officers of the Royal Navy to say that, so far as I know them, they cherish no mistaken enthusiasm for a home on the rolling deep when a home anywhere else presents itself. Bernard Shute had unfortunately proved an exception to this rule. During the winter, the invitation to go for a cruise in the yacht that was in process of building for him hung over me like a cloud; a timely strike in the builder's yard brought a respite, and, in fact, placed the com-

pletion of the yacht at so safe a distance that I was betrayed into specious regrets, echoed with an atrocious sincerity by Philippa. Into a life pastorally compounded of Petty Sessions and lawn-tennis parties, retribution fell when it was least expected. Bernard Shute hired a yacht in Queenstown, and one short week afterwards the worst had happened, and we were packing our things for a cruise in her, the only alleviation being the knowledge that, whether by sea or land, I was bound to return to my work in four days.

We left Shreelane at twelve o'clock, a specially depressing hour for a start, when breakfast has died in you, and lunch is still remote. My last act before mounting the dogcart was to put her collar and chain on Maria and immure her in the potato house, whence, as we drove down the avenue, her wails rent the heart of Philippa and rejoiced mine. It was a very hot day, with a cloudless sky; the dust lay thick on the white road, and on us also, as, during two baking hours, we drove up and down the long hills and remembered things that had been left behind, and grew hungry enough to eat sandwiches that tasted suspiciously of roast beef.

The yacht was moored in Clountiss Harbour; we drove through the village street, a narrow and unlovely thoroughfare, studded with public-houses, swarming with children and poultry, down through an ever-growing smell of fish, to the quay.

Thence we first viewed our fate, a dingy-looking schooner, and the hope I had secretly been nourishing that there was not wind enough for her to start, was dispelled by the sight of her topsail going up. More than ever at that radiant moment—as the reflection of the white sail quivered on the tranquil blue, and the still water flattered all it reproduced, like a fashionable photographer—did I agree with George Herbert's advice, 'Praise the sea, but stay on shore.'

'We must hail her, I suppose,' I said drearily. I assailed the 'Eileen Oge,' such being her inappropriate name, with desolate cries, but achieved no immediate result beyond the assembling of some village children round us and our luggage.

'Mr. Shute and the two ladies was after screeching here for the boat awhile ago,' volunteered a horrid little girl, whom I had already twice frustrated in the attempt to seat a filthy infant relative on our bundle of rugs. 'Timsy Hallahane says 'twould be as good for them to stay ashore, for there isn't as much wind outside as'd out a candle.'

With this encouraging statement the little girl devoted herself to the alternate consumption of gooseberries and cockles.

All things come to those who wait, and to us arrived at length the gig of the 'Eileen Oge,' and such, by this time, were the temperature and the smells of the quay that I actually welcomed the moment that found us leaving it for the yacht.

'Now, Sinclair, aren't you glad we came?' remarked Philippa, as the clear green water deepened under us, and a light briny air came coolly round us with the motion of the boat.

As she spoke, there was an outburst of screams from the children on the quay, followed by a heavy splash.

'Oh stop!' cried Philippa in an agony; 'one of them has fallen in! I can see its poor little brown head!'

'Tis a dog, ma'am,' said briefly the man who was rowing stroke.

'One might have wished it had been that little girl,' said I, as I steered to the best of my ability for the yacht.

We had traversed another twenty yards or so, when Philippa, in a voice in which horror and triumph were strangely blended, exclaimed, 'She's following us!'

'Who? The little girl?' I asked callously.

'No,' returned Philippa; 'worse.'

I looked round, not without a prevision of what I was to see, and beheld the faithful Maria swimming steadily after us, with her brown muzzle thrust out in front of her, ripping through the reflections like a plough.

'Go home!' I roared, standing up and gesticulating in fury that I well knew to be impotent. 'Go home, you brute!'

Maria redoubled her efforts, and Philippa murmured uncontrollably:

'Well, she *is* a dear!'

Had I had a sword in my hand I should undoubtedly have slain Philippa; but before I could express my sentiments in any way, a violent shock flung me endways on top of the man who was pulling stroke. Thanks to Maria, we had reached our destination all unawares; the two men, respectfully awaiting my instructions, had rowed on with disciplined steadiness, and, as a result, we had rammed the 'Eileen Oge' amidships, with a vigour that brought Mr. Shute tumbling up the companion to see what had happened.

'Oh, it's you, is it?' he said, with his mouth full. 'Come in; don't knock! Delighted to see you, Mrs. Yeates; don't apologise.'

There's nothing like a hired ship after all—it's quite jolly to see the splinters fly—shows you're getting your money's worth. Hullo! who's this?'

This was Maria, feigning exhaustion, and noisily treading water at the boat's side.

'What, poor old Maria? Wanted to send her ashore, did he? Heartless ruffian!'

Thus was Maria installed on board the 'Eileen Oge,' and the element of fatality had already begun to work.



SHE'S FOLLOWING US

There was just enough wind to take us out of Clountiss Harbour, and with the last of the out-running tide we crept away to the west. The party on board consisted of our host's sister, Miss Cecilia Shute, Miss Sally Knox, and ourselves; we sat about in conventional attitudes in deck chairs and on adamant deck bosses, and I talked to Miss Shute with feverish brilliancy, and wished the patience-cards were not in the cabin; I knew the supreme importance of keeping one's mind occupied, but I dared not face the cabin. There was a long, almost imperceptible swell, with little queer seabirds that I have

never seen before—and trust I never shall again—dotted about on its glassy slopes. The coast-line looked low and grey and dull, as, I think, coast-lines always do when viewed from the deep. The breeze that Bernard had promised us we should find outside was barely enough to keep us moving. The burning sun of four o'clock focussed its heat on the deck; Bernard stood up among us, engaged in what he was pleased to call 'handling the stick,' and beamed almost as offensively as the sun.

'Oh, we're slipping along,' he said, his odiously healthy face glowing like copper against the blazing blue sky. 'You're going a great deal faster than you think, and the men say we'll pick up a breeze once we're round the Mizen.'

I made no reply; I was not feeling ill, merely thoroughly disinclined for conversation. Miss Sally smiled wanly, and closing her eyes, laid her head on Philippa's knee. Instructed by a dread freemasonry, I knew that for her the moment had come when she could no longer bear to see the rail rise slowly above the horizon, and with an equal rhythmic slowness sink below it. Maria moved restlessly to and fro, panting and yawning, and occasionally rearing herself on her hind legs against the side, and staring forth with wild eyes at the headache sliding of the swell. Perhaps she was meditating suicide; if so I sympathised with her, and since she was obviously going to be sick I trusted that she would bring off the suicide with as little delay as possible. Philippa and Miss Shute sat in unaffected serenity in deck chairs, and stitched at white things—teacloths for the 'Eileen Oge,' I believe, things in themselves a mockery—and talked untiringly, with that singular indifference to their marine surroundings that I have often observed in ladies who are not sea-sick. It always stirs me afresh to wonder why they have not remained ashore; nevertheless, I prefer their tranquil and total lack of interest in seafaring matters to the blatant Vikingism of the average male who is similarly placed.

Somehow, I know not how, we crawled onwards, and by about five o'clock we had rounded the Mizen, a gaunt spike of a headland that starts up like a boar's tush above the ragged lip of the Irish coast, and the 'Eileen Oge' was beginning to swing and wallop in the long sluggish rollers that the American liners know and despise. I was very far from despising them. Down in the west, resting on the sea's rim, a purple bank of clouds lay awaiting the descent of the sun, as seductively and as malevolently as a damp bed at a hotel awaits a traveller.

The end, so far as I was concerned, came at tea-time. The



THERE WAS A LONG, ALMOST IMPERCEPTIBLE SWELL

meal had been prepared in the saloon, and thither it became incumbent on me to accompany my hostess and my wife. Miss Sally, long past speech, opened, at the suggestion of tea, one eye, and disclosed a look of horror. As I tottered down the companion I respected her good sense. The 'Eileen Oge' had been built early in the sixties, and head-room was not her strong point; neither, apparently, was ventilation. I began by dashing my forehead against the frame of the cabin door, and then, shattered morally and physically, entered into the atmosphere of the pit. After which things, and the sight of a plate of rich cake, I retired in good order to my cabin, and began upon the Yanatas.

I pass over some painful intermediate details, and resume at the moment when Bernard Shute woke me from a drugged slumber to announce that dinner was over.

'It's been raining pretty hard,' he said, swaying easily with the swing of the yacht; 'but we've got a clinking breeze, and we ought to make Lurriga Harbour to-night. There's good anchorage there, the men say. They're rather a lot of swabs, but they know this coast, and I don't. I took 'em over with the ship all standing.'

'Where are we now?' I asked, something heartened by the blessed word 'anchorage.'

'You're running up Sheepskin Bay—it's a thundering big bay; Lurriga's up at the far end of it, and the night's as black as the inside of a cow. Dig out and get something to eat, and come on deck—What! no dinner?'—I had spoken, morosely, with closed eyes—'Oh, rot! you're on an even keel now. I promised Mrs. Yeates I'd make you dig out. You're as bad as a soldier officer that we were ferrying to Malta one time in the old "Tamar."' He got one leg out of his berth to get up, when we were going down the Channel, and he was too sick to pull it in again till we got to Gib!'

I compromised on a drink and some biscuits. The ship was certainly steadier, and I felt sufficiently restored to climb weakly on deck. It was by this time past ten o'clock, and heavy clouds blotted out the last of the afterglow, and smothered the stars at their birth. A wet warm wind was lashing the 'Eileen Oge' up a wide estuary; the waves were hunting her, hissing under her stern, racing up to her, crested with the white glow of phosphorus, as she fled before them. I dimly discerned in the greyness the more solid greyness of the shore. The mainsail loomed out into the darkness, nearly at right angles to the yacht, with the

boom creaking as the following wind gave us an additional shove. I know nothing of yacht sailing, but I can appreciate the grand fact that in running before a wind the boom is removed from its usual sphere of devastation.

I sat down beside a bundle of rugs that I had discovered to be my wife, and thought of my whitewashed office at Shree-lane and its bare but stationary floor, with a yearning that was little short of passion. Miss Sally had long since succumbed; Miss Shute was tired, and had turned in soon after dinner.

'I suppose she's overdone by the delirious gaiety of the afternoon,' said I acridly, in reply to this information.

Philippa cautiously poked forth her head from the rugs, like a tortoise from under its shell, to see that Bernard, who was standing near the steersman, was out of hearing.

'In all your life, Sinclair,' she said impressively, 'you never knew such a time as Cecilia and I have had down there! We've had to wash *everything* in the cabins, and remake the beds, and *hurl* the sheets away—they were covered with black finger-marks—and while we were doing that, in came the creature that calls himself the steward, to ask if he might get something of his that he "had left in Miss Shute's birthplace"! and he rooted out from under unfortunate Cecilia's mattress a pair of socks and half a loaf of bread!'

'Consolation to Miss Shute to know her berth has been well aired,' I said with the nearest approach to enjoyment I had known since I came on board; 'and has Sally made any equally interesting discoveries?'

'She said she didn't care what her bed was like, she just dropped into it. I must say I am sorry for her,' went on Philippa; 'she hated coming. Her mother made her accept.'

'I wonder if Lady Knox will make her accept *him*!' I said. 'How often has Sally refused him, does any-one know?'

'Oh, about once a week,' replied Philippa; 'just the way I kept on refusing you, you know!'

Something cold and wet was thrust into my hand, and the aroma of damp dog arose upon the night air; Maria had issued from some lair at the sound of our voices, and was now, with palsied tremblings, slowly trying to drag herself on to my lap.

'Poor thing, she's been so dreadfully ill,' said Philippa. 'Don't send her away, Sinclair. Mr. Shute found her lying on his berth not able to move; didn't you, Mr. Shute?'

'She found out that she was able to move,' said Bernard, who had crossed to our side of the deck; 'it was somehow borne

in upon her when I got at her with a boot tree. I wouldn't advise you to keep her in your lap, Yeates. She stole half a ham after dinner, and she might take a notion to make the only reparation in her power.'

I stood up and stretched myself stiffly. The wind was freshening, and though the growing smoothness of the water told that we were making shelter of some kind, for all that I could see of land we might as well have been in mid-ocean. The heaving lift of the deck under my feet, and the lurching swing when a stronger gust filled the ghostly sails, were more disquieting to me in suggestion than in reality, and, to my surprise, I found something almost enjoyable in rushing through darkness at the pace at which we were going.

'We're a small bit short of the mouth of Lurriga Harbour yet, sir,' said the man who was steering, in reply to a question from Bernard. 'I can see the shore well enough; sure I know every yard of wather in the bay——'

As he spoke he sat down abruptly and violently; so did Bernard, so did I. The bundle that contained Philippa collapsed upon Maria.

'Main sheet!' bellowed Bernard, on his feet in an instant, as the boom swung in and out again with a terrific jerk. 'We're ashore!'

In response to this order three men in succession fell over me while I was still struggling on the deck, and something that was either Philippa's elbow, or the acutest angle of Maria's skull, hit me in the face. As I found my feet the cabin skylight was suddenly illuminated by a wavering glare. I got across the slanting deck somehow, through the confusion of shouting men and the flapping thunder of the sails, and saw through the skylight a gush of flame rising from a pool of fire around an overturned lamp on the swing-table. I avalanched down the companion and was squandered like an avalanche on the floor at the foot of it. Even as I fell, McCarthy the steward dragged the strip of carpet from the cabin floor and threw it on the blaze; I found myself, in some unexplained way, snatching a railway rug from Miss Shute and applying it to the same purpose, and in half a dozen seconds we had smothered the flame and were left in total darkness. The most striking feature of the situation was the immovability of the yacht.

'Great Ned!' said McCarthy, invoking I know not what heathen deity, 'is it on the bottom of the say we are? Well, whether or no, thank God we have the fire quinched!'

We were not, so far, at the bottom of the sea, but during the next ten minutes the chances seemed in favour of our getting there. The yacht had run her bows upon a sunken ridge of rock, and after a period of feminine indecision as to whether she were going to slide off again, or roll over into deep water, she elected to stay where she was, and the gig was lowered with all speed, in order to tow her off before the tide left her.

My recollection of this interval is but hazy, but I can certify that in ten minutes I had swept together an assortment of necessaries and knotted them into my counterpane, had broken the string of my eyeglass, and lost my silver matchbox ; had found Philippa's curling tongs and put them in my pocket ; had carted all the luggage on deck ; had then applied myself to the manly duty of reassuring the ladies, and had found Miss Shute was merely bored, Philippa enthusiastically anxious to be allowed to help to pull the gig, and Miss Sally radiantly restored to health and spirits by the cessation of movement and the probability of an early escape from the yacht.

The rain had, with its usual opportuneness, begun again ; we stood in it under umbrellas, and watched the gig jumping on its tow-rope like a dog on a string, as its crew plied the labouring oar in futile endeavour to move the 'Eileen Oge.' We had run on the rock at half-tide, and the increasing slant of the deck as the tide fell brought home to us the pleasing probability that at low water—viz. about 2 A.M.—we should roll off the rock and go to the bottom. Had Bernard Shute wished to show himself in the most advantageous light to Miss Sally he could scarcely have bettered the situation. I looked on in helpless respect while he whom I had known as the scourge of the hunting field, the terror of the shooting party, rose to the top of a difficult position and kept there, and my respect was, if possible, increased by the presence of mind with which he availed himself of all critical moments to place a protecting arm round Miss Knox.

By about 1 A.M. the two gaffs with which Bernard had contrived to shore up the slowly heeling yacht began to show signs of yielding, and, in approved shipwreck fashion, we took to the boats, the yacht's crew in the gig remaining in attendance on what seemed likely to be the last moments of the 'Eileen Oge,' while we, in the dinghy, sought for the harbour. Owing to the tilt of the yacht's deck, and the roughness of the broken water round her, getting into the boat was no mean feat of gymnastics. Miss Sally did it like a bird, alighting in the inevitable arms of Bernard ; Miss Shute followed very badly, but, by innate force of



MCCARTHY DRAGGED THE STRIP OF CARPET FROM THE CABIN FLOOR AND
THREW IT ON THE BLAZE

character, successfully ; Philippa, who was enjoying every moment of her shipwreck, came last, launching herself into the dinghy with my silver shoe-horn clutched in one hand, and in the other the tea-basket. I heard the hollow clank of its tin cups as she sprang, and appreciated the heroism with which Bernard received one of its corners in his waist. How or when Maria left the yacht I know not, but when I applied myself to the bow oar I led off with three crabs, owing to the devotion with which she thrust her head into my lap.

I am no judge of these matters, but in my opinion we ought to have been swamped several times during that row. There was nothing but the phosphorus of breaking waves to tell us where the rocks were, and nothing to show where the harbour was except a solitary light, a masthead light, as we supposed. The skipper had assured us that we could not go wrong if we kept 'a westerly course with a little northing in it;' but it seemed simpler to steer for the light, and we did so. The dinghy climbed along over the waves with an agility that was safer than it felt; the rain fell without haste and without rest, the oars were as inflexible as crowbars, and somewhat resembled them in shape and weight; nevertheless, it was Elysium when compared with the afternoon leisure of the deck of the 'Eileen Oge.'

At last we came, unexplainably, into smooth water, and it was at about this time that we were first aware that the darkness was less dense than it had been, and that the rain had ceased. By imperceptible degrees a greyness touched the back of the waves, more a dreariness than a dawn, but more welcome than thousands of gold and silver. I looked over my shoulder and discerned vague bulky things ahead; as I did so, my oar was suddenly wrapped in seaweed. We crept on; Maria stood up with her paws on the gunwale, and whined in high agitation. The dark objects ahead resolved themselves into rocks, and without more ado Maria pitched herself into the water. In half a minute we heard her shaking herself on shore. We slid on; the water swelled under the dinghy, and lifted her keel on to grating gravel.

'We couldn't have done it better if we'd been the Hydrographer Royal,' said Bernard, wading knee-deep in a light wash of foam, with the painter in his hand; 'but all the same, that masthead light is someone's bedroom candle!'

We landed, hauled up the boat, and then feebly sat down on our belongings to review the situation, and Maria came and shook herself over each of us in turn. We had run into a little

cove, guided by the philanthropic beam of a candle in the upper window of a house about a hundred yards away. The candle still burned on, and the anæmic daylight exhibited to us our surroundings, and we debated as to whether we could at 2.45 A.M. present ourselves as objects of compassion to the owner of the candle. I need hardly say that it was the ladies who decided on making the attempt, having, like most of their sex, a courage incomparably superior to ours in such matters; Bernard and I had not a grain of genuine compunction in our souls, but we failed in nerve.

We trailed up from the cove, laden with emigrants' bundles, stumbling on wet rocks in the half-light, and succeeded in making our way to the house.

It was a small two-storied building, of that hideous breed of architecture usually dedicated to the rectories of the Irish Church; we felt that there was something friendly in the presence of a pair of carpet slippers in the porch, but there was a hint of exclusiveness in the fact that there was no knocker and the bell was broken. The light still burned in the upper window, and with a faltering hand I flung gravel at the glass. This summons was appallingly responded to by a shriek; there was a flutter of white at the panes, and the candle was extinguished.

'Come away!' exclaimed Miss Shute, 'it's a lunatic asylum!'

We stood our ground, however, and presently heard a footstep within, a blind was poked aside in another window, and we were inspected by an unseen inmate; then someone came downstairs, and the hall door was opened by a small man with a bald head and a long sandy beard. He was attired in a brief dressing-gown, and on his shoulder sat, like an angry ghost, a large white cockatoo. Its crest was up on end, its beak was a good two inches long and curved like a Malay kris; its claws gripped the little man's shoulder. Maria uttered in the background a low and thunderous growl.

'Don't take any notice of the bird, please,' said the little man nervously, seeing our united gaze fixed upon this apparition; 'he's extremely fierce if annoyed.'

The majority of our party here melted away to either side of the hall door, and I was left to do the explaining. The tale of our misfortunes had its due effect, and we were ushered into a small drawing-room, our host holding open the door for us, like a nightmare footman with bare shins, a gnome-like bald head, and an unclean spirit swaying on his shoulder. He opened the shutters, and we sat decorously round the room, as at an after-

noon party, while the situation was further expounded on both sides. Our entertainer, indeed, favoured us with the leading items of his family history, amongst them the facts that he was a Dr. Fahy from Cork, who had taken somebody's rectory for the summer, and had been prevailed on by some of his patients to permit them to join him as paying guests.

'I said it was a lunatic asylum,' murmured Miss Shute to me.

'In point of fact,' went on our host, 'there isn't an empty room in the house, which is why I can only offer your party the use of this room and the kitchen fire, which I make a point of keeping burning all night.'

He leaned back complacently in his chair, and crossed his legs; then, obviously remembering his costume, sat bolt upright again. We owed the guiding beams of the candle to the owner of the cockatoo, an old Mrs. Buck, who was, we gathered, the most paying of all the patients, and also, obviously, the one most feared and cherished by Dr. Fahy. 'She has a candle burning all night for the bird, and her door open to let him walk about the house when he likes,' said Dr. Fahy; 'indeed, I may say her passion for him amounts to dementia. He's very fond of me, and Mrs. Fahy's always telling me I should be thankful, as whatever he did we'd be bound to put up with it!'

Dr. Fahy had evidently a turn for conversation that was unaffected by circumstance; the first beams of the early sun were lighting up the rep chair covers before the door closed upon his brown dressing-gown, and upon the stately white back of the cockatoo, and the demoniac possession of laughter that had wrought in us during the interview burst forth unchecked. It was most painful and exhausting, as such laughter always is; but by far the most serious part of it was that Miss Sally, who was sitting in the window, somehow drove her elbow through a pane



OUR ENTERTAINER

of glass, and Bernard, in pulling down the blind to conceal the damage, tore it off the roller.

There followed on this catastrophe a period during which reason tottered and Maria barked furiously. Philippa was the first to pull herself together and to suggest an adjournment to the kitchen fire that, in honour of the paying guests, was never quenched, and, respecting the repose of the household, we proceeded thither with a stealth that convinced Maria we were engaged in a rat hunt. The boots of paying guests littered the floor, the débris of their last repast covered the table; a cat in some unseen fastness crooned a war song to Maria, who feigned unconsciousness and fell to scientific research in the scullery.

We roasted our boots at the range, and Bernard, with all a sailor's gift for exploration and theft, prowled in noisome purlieus and emerged with a jug of milk and a lump of salt butter. No one who has not been a burglar can at all realise what it was to roam through Dr. Fahy's basement story, with the rookery of paying guests asleep above, and to feel that, so far, we had repaid his confidence by breaking a pane of glass and a blind, and putting the scullery tap out of order. I have always maintained that there was something wrong with it before I touched it, but the fact remains that when I had filled Philippa's kettle, no human power could prevail upon it to stop flowing. For all I know to the contrary it is running still.

It was in the course of our furtive return to the drawing-room that we were again confronted by Mrs. Buck's cockatoo. It was standing in malign meditation on the stairs, and on seeing us it rose, without a word of warning, upon the wing, and with a long screech flung itself at Miss Sally's golden-red head, which a ray of sunlight had chanced to illumine. There was a moment of stampede, as the selected victim, pursued by the cockatoo, fled into the drawing-room; two chairs were upset (one, I think, broken), Miss Sally enveloped herself in a window curtain, Philippa and Miss Shute effaced themselves beneath a table; the cockatoo, foiled of its prey, skimmed, screeching, round the ceiling. It was Bernard who, with a well-directed sofa-cushion, drove the enemy from the room. There was only a chink of the door open, but the cockatoo turned on his side as he flew, and swung through it like a woodcock.

We slammed the door behind him, and at the same instant there came a thumping on the floor overhead, muffled, yet peremptory.

'That's Mrs. Buck!' said Miss Shute, crawling from under

the table; 'the room over this is the one that had the candle in it.'

We sat for a time in awful stillness, but nothing further happened, save a distant shriek overhead, that told the cockatoo had sought and found sanctuary in his owner's room. We had tea *sotto voce*, and then, one by one, despite the amazing discomfort of the drawing-room chairs, we dozed off to sleep.

It was at about five o'clock that I woke with a stiff neck and an uneasy remembrance that I had last seen Maria in the kitchen. The others, looking, each of them, about twenty years older than their age, slept in various attitudes of exhaustion. Bernard opened his eyes as I stole forth to look for Maria, but none of the ladies awoke. I went down the evil-smelling passage that led to the kitchen stairs, and there on a mat, regarding me with intelligent affection, was Maria; but what—oh what was the white thing that lay between her forepaws?

The situation was too serious to be coped with alone. I fled noiselessly back to the drawing-room and put my head in; Bernard's eyes—blessed be the light sleep of sailors!—opened again, and there was that in mine that summoned him forth. (Blessed also be the light step of sailors!)

We took the corpse from Maria, withholding perforce the language and the slaughtering that our hearts ached to bestow. For a minute or two our eyes communed.

'I'll get the kitchen shovel,' breathed Bernard; 'you open the hall door!'

A moment later we passed like spirits into the open air, and on into a little garden at the end of the house. Maria followed us, licking her lips. There were beds of nasturtiums, and of purple stocks, and of marigolds. We chose a bed of stocks, a plump bed, that looked like easy digging. The windows were all tightly shut and shuttered, and I took the cockatoo from under my coat and hid it, temporarily, behind a box border. Bernard had brought a shovel and a coal scoop. We dug like badgers. At eighteen inches we got down into shale and stones, and the coal scoop struck work.

'Never mind,' said Bernard; 'we'll plant the stocks on top of him.'

It was a lovely morning, with a new-born blue sky and a light northerly breeze. We looked across the wavelets of the little cove and saw, above the rocky point round which we had groped last night, a triangular white patch moving slowly along.

'The tide's lifted her!' said Bernard, standing stock-still. He

looked at Mrs. Buck's window and at me. 'Yeates!' he whispered, 'let's quit!'

It was now barely six o'clock, and not a soul was stirring. We woke the ladies and convinced them of the high importance of catching the tide. Bernard left a note on the hall table for Dr. Fahy, a beautiful note of leave-taking and gratitude, and apology for the broken window (for which he begged to enclose half a crown). No allusion was made to the other casualties. As we neared the boathouse he found an occasion to say to me:

'I put in a postscript that I thought it best to mention that I had seen the cockatoo in the garden, and hoped it would get back all right. That's quite true, you know! But look here, whatever you do, you must keep it all dark from the ladies——'

At this juncture Maria overtook us with the cockatoo in her mouth.



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